

Message Text

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16

ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 180450Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2193

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6831

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MARR, VS, US

SUBJECT: CONCERN OVER SAIGON SCENE

1. GVN AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRALIA NGUYEN PHOUNG THIEP SOUGHT ME OUT AT MY HOME LAST NIGHT UPON HIS RETURN FROM THREE WEEKS IN SOUTH VIETNAM TO ATTEND THE FUNERAL OF HIS YOUNGER BROTHER, AS WELL AS TO CONSULT WITH GVN LEADERS, INCLUDING LENGTHY TALK WITH PRESIDENT THIEU.

2. MAIN PURPOSE OF HIS CALL WAS TO EXPRESS WORRIES OVER RUMORS OF COUP D'ETAT IN SAIGON AND FACT THAT THIEU SEEMED SO NERVOUS. HE ASCRIBED THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS TO WIDE RESENTMENT OVER CORRUPTION AMONGST TOP MILITARY BRASS AND CERTAIN BUSINESS LEADERS. THIEU FULLY AWARE OF POPULAR REACTIONS, BUT HE HAS TO EXERCISE CARE IN DEALING WITH MILITARY. MEANWHILE, THIEP SAID, THIEU IS UNDER PRESSURE FROM AMERICANS TO BROADEN THE BASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT, BUT THIS HAS GIVEN RISE TO CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AS TO WHETHER US IS PUSHING FOR A COALITION GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING PRG, OR WHETHER WE SIMPLY ARE ADVOCATING WIDENING THE GOVERNMENT'S BASE AMONGST NON-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS. WHEN I INTERJECTED IT WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT THE FORMER, THIEP OBSERVED THAT THERE WAS NEVERTHELESS CONFUSION ON THIS POINT IN SAIGON.

3. ALL THIS HAS PUT THIEU'S ABILITY TO GOVERN TO THE TEST, THIEP CONTINUED. THIEU'S REACTION IS NOT TO BRING UNRELIABLE AND INEFFICIENT POLITICIANS INTO THE GOVERNMENT, BUT RATHER TO SURROUND
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HIMSELF WITH THOSE MEN ON WHOM HE CAN RELY AND WHO ARE TECHNICALLY COMPETENT. HE DOES NOT FEEL THAT EFFICIENCY CAN BE ACHIEVED WITH AN ENTOURAGE OF VYING POLITICIANS. THIEU ALSO WISHES TO REACH DOWN IN THE MILITARY RANKS TO THOSE COLONELS TRUSTED FOR

THEIR MILITARY COMPETENCE TO REPLACE CORRUPT GENERALS, BUT THIS IS A DELICATE OPERATION THAT WILL REQUIRE TIME AND SKILL IN HANDLING.

4. THIEP MENTIONED THE CONFLICT BETWEEN COMMISSIONER FOR INFORMATION NHA AND PRESIDENTIAL AIDENGAN WHO ARE BOTH CENTRAL VIETNAMESE, LIKE THIEU AND THIEP. THIEP FELT THAT NHA REPRESENTED THE SAME KIND OF BALEFUL INFLUENCE IN THIEU'S GOVERNMENT THAT NHU HAD IN DIEM'S. HE DID NOT ENLARGE.

5. I REPORT THESE OBSERVATIONS FOR WHAT THEY ARE WORTH BUT THEY SEEM OUT OF FOCUS.
GREEN

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<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

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